

BOOK REVIEWS



IN CHARGE OF

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PRIMARY NURSING TECHNIQUE. By Isabel McIsaac, Late Superintendent Illinois Training School For Nurses, Chicago. The MacMillan Company, London and New York.

Development is a process which admits of no periods of inaction. Arrested development never means a standing still. It is always accompanied by retrogression. The nursing profession furnishes us with a striking example of this truth. For twenty or thirty years after what has been called "renascence of the nineteenth century" the main object of the training school for nurses was to supply the demand for trained attendants for the sick in their homes. This training was acquired in the hospital wards where the pupil nurses paid in hard service for the experience gained, and the teaching of the technique of nursing depended largely on the leisure time which the head nurse was able to abstract from her manifold duties; the theory of nursing came from lectures often condensed bewilderingly and as a rule delivered from the standpoint of the relation of the subject to the practice of medicine, surgery, obstetrics, etc. Then came the days when nursing became so popular that an applicant expected to wait a year or more for her appointment to enter the training school on probation, and hospitals of every character and dimension opened training schools, or in some instances allowed young women to do the work of the hospital for the privilege of a diploma attesting to a training they never had.

Then came a period of unrest—nurses themselves were their own critics—and the regenerative movement began in the formation of the various societies—state and national—the Superintendents' Society, the Nurses' Associated Alumnae, etc., the various objects of which may be briefly stated:—the creating and maintaining proper standards for the nursing profession. There is no need to dwell on the far-reaching and effectual effort which has emanated from these societies—one branch of this energy, however, becomes our present consideration.

The preparatory course of training for the probationer has become a rule in schools maintaining the highest standards, and with this, there

has come a demand for suitable text books. The present volume is the first of a series especially designed to meet the needs of the preliminary course. If the old saw "Well begun is half done" be true, then the author of the remaining numbers in the series is to be congratulated. The initial number is as the title indicates concerned with the technique of primary nursing. Formerly the method was to put the green probationer behind a screen with a patient, more or less suffering, and there leave them to worry out the problem; the preliminary course provides a means, in the clinical demonstration, for the pupil probationer to acquire a certain amount of technique before she comes at all in contact with a patient too weak and ill to protect herself from the zealous pupil's efforts at ministration. The pupil has had opportunity to have her sharp corners well rubbed down, if her subjects for demonstration are her fellow probationers who will criticise freely and resent volubly, before she touches a *bona fide* patient. The book opens with an outline for ten clinical demonstrations for the instruction of the junior nurse—each two hours long and to serve as a review of work already taught. These demonstrations follow the plan adhered to throughout the book of regarding the subject as "taught in relation to nursing and not to medical practice." The pupil has certain duties to perform for the patient—these duties involve the need for cleanliness and comfort—heat, air, food, medicine, etc., all of which the pupil nurse is required to know how to arrange for. The classification of nursing is not touched upon—but the author suggests that all training both theoretical and practical begin with medical nursing, the other branches following in order, viz.: Surgical, Operating room, Gynecological, Contagious, Children, Obstetrical. Thus the teaching of primary nursing technique in the present volume is confined to medical nursing, including the usual ward duties, serving of food, etc. Let no one infer, however, that the subject is narrow or the matter limited. One remembers that medical nursing includes all that is interesting in baths, sponging, packs, tubs, hot air, steam; or again the fomentations, poultices, ice-bags, cuppings, ice-coils; the gastric lavage, and gastric gavage; hypodermoclysis, transfusion, etc. Add to these the curious and interesting variations in temperature, pulse and respiration to be noted in medical nursing; the phenomena of the interchange of functions, as the skin and the bowels taking the stress of work off the kidneys when the latter are disabled, or the intestines maintaining the nourishment of the body when the stomach is out of commission, take into consideration all these and many more interesting phases of medical nursing and add to them the fact that Miss McIsaac brings to bear upon them her long experience and her

habit of intelligent observation and clear and accurate expression, and you have some idea of what the book becomes under her treatment. There is a suggestion of something humane, something kindly and sympathetic, infused into the extremely business-like lesson book, calculated to give the pupil a confident expectation of finding an occasional blossom at least in the wilderness, arid though it be, for the most part. This infusion of a benign influence is probably due to the insistence of the author that the primary object of nursing is to serve and help the sick. The sentimental side of the question is not touched upon, however; indeed one might say that ethics have supplanted sentiment.

It is rather a pleasant picture, on the whole, of a nurse's duties, the safe precinct of the hospital ward, the watchful eye of a superior officer who decides all vexing problems, the dependent patients to whom the junior is so important a personage, the daily and hourly wooing of those shy spirits—Order, System, Theory and Practice—who are to be conquered and made the faithful servants of the would-be nurse. There is every encouragement too to the would-be probationer—that with effort and purpose she can attain to the goal, even though she lacks graces or the higher education that some of her fellows start with. There is indeed no royal road to learning to be a nurse according to Miss McIsaac, but there is a very good pike whereon many find it no great difficulty to travel to their journey's end.

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